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UNCLAS BAGHDAD 004094

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E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [ECON](#) [EZ](#)
SUBJECT: AL-BATHA MAYOR SEEKS DONOR SUPPORT

11. (U) This is a PRT Dhi Qar cable.

12. (SBU) SUMMARY: Dhi Qar PRT and U.S. Army Civil Affairs (CA) personnel met with the Mayor of Al-Batha, a small town located approximately 15 KM from provincial capital, Al-Nasiriyah, on September 12 at the Mayor's office. The mayor, Mr. Ali Faad Al Shershah, discussed his view of ongoing US reconstruction projects, the security situation, and the local population's perception of Coalition Forces in Dhi Qar. While admitting that the province is "restive," the mayor stated that Dhi Qar citizens remain thankful that Coalition Forces overthrew the previous regime and are looking forward to further cooperation with the PRT and Coalition Forces as reconstruction proceeds. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) The agenda of the meeting included discussions about ongoing CA projects in Al-Batha, including a road paving project and an agricultural irrigation project. The CA lead commander confided privately to the PRT's IPAO prior to the meeting that the Mayor and the City Council have done a good job of overseeing the contracting process for these projects, conscientiously finding quality bidders and ensuring the contracts were executed correctly.

14. (SBU) During the meeting, the CA commander emphasized to the Mayor the Coalition Forces' and international donors' commitment to rebuild Dhi Qar, but indicated it was difficult to attract donors in the current security environment. He used as an example the fact that the Tallil U.S. Air Force Base came under rocket attack last week at the very moment he was escorting a UN delegation around the base and trying to communicate to them the relative safety of the province.

15. (SBU) The Mayor and other Iraqi officials present responded by downplaying the rocket attack on Tallil and other recent insurgent violence, suggesting that the insurgency, though a threat to CF, is not popular among citizens of the province. The Mayor said the local people consider the American forces as friendly forces because they are here to rebuild the country and we deposed Saddam Hussein. Moreover, he emphasized that the people are willing to cooperate fully with the CF and international donors. He said the general feeling on the street is that American forces are not "occupiers," but rather the people who got rid of Saddam Hussein. The mayor opined that Dhi Qar could be the stepping stone for the rest of the south: when the rest of the south sees how well things are going here, people in the other southern provinces will cooperate more fully with Coalition Forces.

16. (SBU) COMMENT: The Iraqis are trying hard to communicate that Dhi Qar is a safe area for PRT, CF, and international donors and that citizens of the province are serious about cooperating with us to the extent we can help them rebuild. Their principal concern is inducing the U.S. side to provide

money and projects. To this end, they take pains to emphasize that the security situation in Dhi Qar is relatively stable when compared to other areas of Iraq. They understand that violence will divert money away from the province and they thus have a vested interest in cracking down on militants. The mayor and other Iraqi attendees at this meeting had definite ideas on how to spend the donors' money, and were genuinely concerned that donor money not be wasted on projects based on patronage and that quality control be assured for every project. END COMMENT.
KHALILZAD